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***What
does
move
history?***



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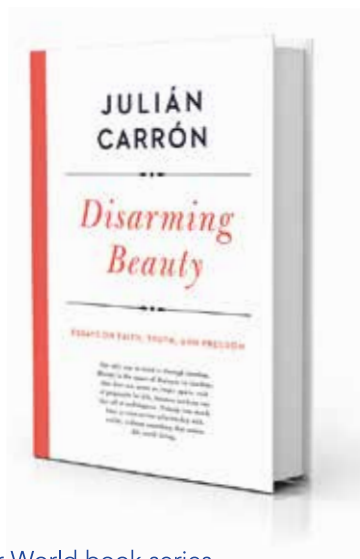
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JULIÁN CARRÓN

Disarming Beauty

ESSAYS ON FAITH, TRUTH, AND FREEDOM



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Minute by minute

What makes us happy? What can *truly* fill the human heart, deep down? This may seem like a hackneyed or even insignificant question compared to other issues that at first sight would seem much bigger, such as politics or the economy. And yet it is a crucial question, the only one that truly matters, that is worthwhile asking yourself and others, ceaselessly, because our life is decided by the answer, day by day, minute by minute.

There is a line from the Gospel that Fr. Giussani used to repeat often, beginning in the early days of the life of the Movement: “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?” (Mt. 16:26). It is a threshold question, such a clear criterion that we know well what happens in the rare times we take it seriously. But he said something else, spoken to a group of CL leaders in the early 1990s, of similar import that, in judging history, separates the essential from the superfluous. “The great problem of the world today is no longer an interrogative theorization, but an existential question. Not: ‘Who is right?’ but: ‘How is it possible to live?’” In other words the question is: What enables the heart to be glad, the lungs to breathe, a person to get up again and walk in the midst of the toils of life? In the end, this is our urgent need, not to formulate more acute analyses and theories that solve the drama of history, but instead to live.

The upcoming Meeting of Rimini will speak about these things, about “the forces that move history” and about what fills our heart. If we forget about the question of what enables the heart to be glad, if in the drive to seek solutions to the great problems that surround us—the tragedy of migrants, the crumbling of Europe, the suffering of the innocent, the thousands of injustices—we set aside that apparently insignificant question, we will not make much progress. In all probability we will be destined to add errors on top of errors. History tells us this, even recent history (it is no coincidence that the title of this year’s Meeting is a line that was said soon after 1968). But if we go in search of Him who truly fills the heart, if we search for facts, testimonies, and circumstances that show this fullness—show that it is real, that it happens, and is therefore possible—the outlook suddenly changes.

The pages you will read here follow the path of this search, from the themes of the Meeting to the story of families waiting for the Pope in Dublin (in a land where faith seems to have been defeated by history, but also where a different reality is emerging around those who live it), to Tilburg in Holland, where Fr. Michiel Peeters opens the doors of his chaplaincy to students from all over the world. These testimonies and facts are the buds of a different society because history moves when women and men change, when I change.

Rossella, Beatrice, Serena, Silvia, Carla

edited by
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How will we encounter the Mystery?

A little more than three years ago, my husband and I moved from Puglia to Florida for a job opportunity at a university. I still remember when his professor came to get us at the Miami airport. “You’ll feel good at work, but you’ll be alone.” She was mistaken. We lived on the west coast of Florida for two years, where we had many friends and where I lived the experience of Pope Francis, who told us to go out and meet people. Then we moved to the east coast. We were far from our friends but little by little we found other people and other colleagues, and our network of relationships blossomed all over Florida. I rediscovered my husband and we became closer. Even the moments when I had to be alone changed—I was no longer afraid, and those moments became a chance to experience what the Bible says: “I will bring her to the desert and speak tenderly to her heart.” Soon we would move again, this time to Pennsylvania. It seemed so difficult to leave now that our friendships had matured. Our friends organized a goodbye party in Miami and Fr. José Medina [the leader of the Movement in the U.S.] changed his flight so he could be with us. I can see clearly how God has taken care of us in these years and has given us many friends. When we moved and met new people, it was His face that changed each time. We never lost our previous relationships and a spirit of friendship has grown. How can I be afraid of moving again? I am so curious to discover the new faces through which the Mystery will show Itself.

Rossella, Vero Beach (USA)

My face at the soup kitchen window

Dear Fr. Carrón, for a few months now, I have been doing charitable work at a soup kitchen that serves about 300 people. My job is to serve food to these people; some are drunk, others are on drugs, some are Italian, others are foreigners, some are elderly, and there are even some caregivers. Not long ago, I would have been afraid of them if I had met them on the street. Each volunteer has a window and people can see you only from the shoulders up, and for security reasons, we try to avoid too much contact. The interaction with the people boils down to your face and how you prepare the tray of food. On Saturday, a young Tunisian came to my window. He had a hard time speaking, perhaps because he had been drinking. He looked at me and said, “I will always come to you to be served because you have a smile that touches my heart, like a mother, like my mother in Tunisia. And today I brought my good friend because I wanted him to see your smile and to be served by you.” The next day I went to visit my mother. I found her very distressed by my brother’s behavior. My first feeling was of annoyance, or better yet, of great anger toward him. On my way home, I decided to call him. I could have played the “moral one,” as I had plenty to chastise him for. Then the eyes of the young Tunisian came to my mind. My call to my brother became a reprimand within an embrace. So, I think I can say, with some stammering, that this is familiarity with Him.

Name withheld

The same “fixation,” companions toward the same goal

Dearest classmates, in these days between the end of classes and the preparation of evenings for the graduating class, a period in which we have become aware that time is moving quickly, I haven’t been able to think much about myself, about us. Certainly, we are

not close friends with everyone; we are closer to some than to others, but we all have the same “fixation,” we are all following the same path, and that makes us companions. As my friend, Jacobo, told me, “We are companions moving toward the same goal,” so who cares if we’re not buddy-buddy with everyone. We are friends because we have a desire that is great and beautiful. I take with me this education that told us to look at life with our hearts. Who teaches us to look with our hearts? Parents prepare you for everyday life, school prepares you for the adult world, your casual friends for new and stupid things. But true friends prepare your heart. I have learned through experience that you can live life only by doing as Mary did. It’s not easy. It’s bothersome and a burden, but only living that way makes the heart completely free. I’ve often asked myself who brought me to you because in order to feel that this is where I belong, I’ve had to go through so much and in some way I’ve had to “leave” other friends. I said “yes” to only one event because of Albertino’s continual insistence. There’s a phrase I particularly love that goes, “There’s never a less without a more.” It’s true because everything comes back around; never as we want it, but it does come back around. The other day, Gio sent me this phrase: “God doesn’t create a desire or a hope without having ready a reality that can make it come true.” We need to truly trust. I think of Luca, who at Portofranco asked himself what his life would be like without GS, the Movement, and everything else. I don’t know either, but Someone, Something, exists now, who tells us, “Look and choose, judge, decide with your heart.” It’s not a feeling; it’s a judgment. It happens when we live an unpleasant evening like at Portofranco awhile ago and we return home asking ourselves, “But is this for me?” I discovered that to suppress the heart is self-destruction. But to not feel it is even more painful; this is when we enter an apathetic phase in which nothing interests us anymore. Our desire dies, and we want to somehow revive it. Here, what saves us is to be faithful in the way that the Chieffo song, “La Favola,” describes: “Don’t be afraid, take to the fields and go, don’t stop, don’t turn back, and go, there is Someone with you.” This Someone is for me very specific people, the people who in these days, tossed about between stress and boredom, make me see that my desire is not dead. So, we must never turn back, because where would we go away to from here? There is no one else who educates me in this way, who lives in this way, and I can say this concerning all the relationships I now have and have had. When I have felt exhausted, groping

around, I’ve always kept my eyes open. I saw with what tenacity Albertino attaches himself to us, with what confidence Spado has entrusted herself to us; I looked at Leo, who has always been true to the friendship he has seen, and Matteo who called me a thousand times to remind me of the Ray meeting. I want to discover always more this God who loves me so.

Beatrice, Milan (Italy)

A dinner to help Vivian to get driver’s license

Dear Fr. Carrón, we wanted to help Vivian, a Nigerian woman who is married with four children. We bring her food packages [the charitable work of the Solidarity Bank]. A few months ago, we suggested that she try to register for driving lessons so she could be more independent and maybe find a job. She replied with a simple, “We’ll see.” A few weeks ago, we discovered that she had passed the written test and that as soon as she had some money, she would take the driving test. We decided to help her pay for the test. When she heard our proposal, she burst into tears and could barely get out a “thank you.” Everything started with great simplicity: an invitation on WhatsApp and some emails about a dinner and some good music and a small donation. We wanted to help Vivian, but without any expectation that we would resolve a problem for her. We wanted to celebrate this milestone together with her, to let her know that she did a good job in passing the written test and that she wasn’t alone. In her, we saw ourselves. Her need was our need. It’s possible to walk if someone is with you, even when you can’t see anything good. A few days before the registration deadline for the test, we had received so few confirmations we thought we might host the dinner at someone’s house. But then a few days before the dinner, after a lot of phone calls and texts, enthusiasm spread quickly. Vivian brought her friend, Gloria, who, at the end of the evening, sang a song that amazed and moved everyone. The lyrics say, “God will make a way where there is no way. Whatever He has said, He will do, because He is faithful to me.” We collected more than we could have imagined. There is a way. He has been faithful. He has shown Himself to us, and we have done nothing but surrender to His initiative.

Serena, Silvia, Carla, Italy

The heart and history

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The appointment is for Rimini, on August 19th, the day the 39th Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples opens, with a title from long ago: ***The Forces That Move History Are the Same That Make Man Happy.*** Fr. Giussani said this to a student in the chaotic months after 1968, when it seemed that “revolution,” changes in society, a world less “bourgeois” and more consonant with the very human desire for justice, truth, and freedom were in the process of happening. Things did not go that way—one could say that the opposite happened. But the change of epoch we are experiencing today is in some way the child of that attempt, that “historic caesura,” as Benedict XVI called it. A careful look at those times is fundamental for understanding ours. For this purpose, we offer a conversation with Emilia Guarnieri, today the president of the Rimini Meeting, but 50 years ago a witness to a crucial moment in which Fr. Giussani understood what the events of that time were saying to the Church and the Movement he had started. In addition we present previews of two of the many topics of the upcoming Meeting (pain, the suffering of the innocent, and losing a relationship with God, as described in an exhibit on Job and by a performance of Claudel’s *The Satin Slipper*.) The second stage will be next month, when we will continue with these subjects after the Meeting has concluded. At that point, we will have developed some elements for better understanding the history of 1968 and the crucial question: *What moves our hearts today?* (dp) ■

For more info about the Meeting go to www.meetingrimini.org





Close-up



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The first Rimini Meeting, 1980. Second from left, the American painter, William Congdon.



The **force** of reality

The president of the Rimini Meeting, Emilia Guarnieri, explains this year's title, and the reason it is rooted in both the 1968 revolution and in the "revolution" proposed by Fr. Giussani...



by **Davide Perillo**

"The fascination of 1968? We felt it too, of course. The anti-conformity, the desire for truth, the idea of justice... These things also marked the experience of Student Youth (GS). It's logical that we were attracted by them." The Rimini Meeting is also rooted in that moment in history, not only because the line that serves as this year's title was spoken in that period, when Fr. Giussani answered a Student Youth member attracted by the protests and the idea of seeking "the forces that move history," by responding, "The forces that move history are the same that make men happy," but also because of the contingent circumstances that bound the founder of CL to Rimini and to that year.

Alberto Savorana recounts very well in chapter 14 of *The Life of Luigi Giussani* the general context, the allure of the student movement, and the abandonment of Student Youth by a good portion of its members. The little group that chose to remain responded to the little bosses who told them, "Forget about him: he's just an old man who always says the same things," by inviting Fr. Giussani to spend a couple of days with them in an old farmhouse in Torello, in the countryside of Emilia Romagna.

From there, Giussani began again with an idea that would be a turning point for his personal story and that of CL: it was no longer possible to talk to young people about Christianity starting from "tradition," because it had become an

empty word. It would be possible to start again only from a fascination for a Presence. At the time they understood little, but they remained. Years later, more or less the same group gave life to the Meeting, including Emilia Guarnieri, who has been president of the event since 1993.

In 1968, she was studying in Bologna with Antonio Smurro, who would later become her husband, and other Student Youth friends. “We were so enthusiastic about freedom, about breaking with the moldy academicism that characterized the university. All this interested us.” Why didn’t you leave GS? “Because for us, Student Youth was something that counted, a friendship that had weight. Perhaps we didn’t understand *how*. Many times for us, it was not capable of judging reality. But we had the experience that life without what we had encountered was less beautiful.” She experienced this concretely in her own life. “I don’t talk about it often, but Antonio and I had already left a year-and-a-half earlier for various reasons linked to certain friendships. But we saw that we were not enough for ourselves, and felt suffocated. After a few months, when someone reached out a hand, we came back.”

They saw Giussani much less often. “But something he told me stayed in my heart. We met in an elevator during my first Student Youth vacation in 1963. I was sort of ambivalent. He asked me, ‘How’s it going?’ and I said, ‘I don’t know. I didn’t even really want to come.’ He smiled at me

and said, ‘Well, now you’re here.’ I still carry in my heart that *now you’re here*. It was the truest thing in the world, much truer than my thoughts.” For this reason, when the crisis depopulated Student Youth in Rimini, she found herself thinking, “Well, what about me?” “We had maintained the perception of this ‘I’ and of an ‘us’ that I could not separate. Marina Valmaggi, a friend of ours, suggested we try to talk with Giussani. He came right away.” What do you remember of Torello? “That it was good to be there. We were glad to be with him and he loved us. He enjoyed our company, enjoyed the fact that we were there. He hadn’t decided on any speeches to give, or a line to propose. To tell you the truth, I don’t really remember what he said to us. I’ve rediscovered it reading Savorana’s book. However, I remember well the clear perception that I could trust him deep down. When we returned home, we had a clear word: communion. What we had experienced was true, and we would not abandon it, even if we had no idea what impact it could have on history.”

The impact on history. For Giussani it was as clear as the line that is the title of the Meeting. For the Student Youth members in Rimini, their rediscovery of Giussani had required a long journey that was still underway. “We began to return to being attached to him. We set up something called a ‘group of communion’ in which we did more or less what we do now with the Fraternity: Mass, dinner together, reading *Litterae Communionis*. But we also

read things produced by the Left. In short, we didn’t have very clear ideas. We spent the 1970s in this ‘general bewilderment,’ as Fr. Giussani called it, but bound to him and each other, with a great need for expressivity and for being present, and also participated in some initiatives, like the cultural center and the school. Till the idea of the Meeting.” The story is simple. One evening among friends in a pizzeria (“I wasn’t there that evening because I was home with our young children”) someone threw out the idea, and then they started talking about contacts, relationships, and things to try. The first Meeting took place in August of 1980. That date also marked the end of the terrible years of terrorism and struggle in Italy in the 1970s and was a difficult time for the newborn CL as well. “Thinking back on all this, I’m struck because we went through those years focusing on a desire to have an impact, maybe naively, but without being intimidated by what was happening all around us.” Why? “The energy of the story we belonged to was stronger. Mixed with a lot of confusion on our part, of course, but strong. There was a lot of the idea of ‘doing,’ which often became frenzy. It was a ‘doing’ that God accompanied with His mercy.” What does that mean? “We were prey to many misunderstandings, but we had a road: Giussani’s faithfulness to a companionship with us. We were like a child who doesn’t understand but is embraced. This is why in the beginning, speaking about the Meeting, he said: ‘Go forward. There is good here, and time will correct things.’”

Here we come back to that line of Giussani's, to the alternative between your own projects for changing history and the faithfulness of the heart. Why is this the title of this year's Meeting? "The title is trying to answer a question: What is most needed today? In front of the fact that today nothing holds anymore, in front of the collapse of certainties, is there something that we can cling to? Yes: the desire of the heart and its capacity to recognize what corresponds to it. It is something that exists regardless of any collapse. It must be educated, certainly, but it exists, and it is a point of strength that is available to everyone. History changes, starting from that point. Not in the future, but now."

So then, the accent is on the second half of the title, and it dictates the method of the event. "We threw ourselves into looking at pieces of reality and valorizing the positive in them, because the power of things lies in what's interesting and positive. We've invited people who are intimately acquainted with certain themes, who have begun to ask themselves questions and to seek answers by looking at reality, more than by conducting analyses."

So then, there are many issues. Along with the topics to be addressed from the stage—the first will be a talk by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, followed by the usual series of testimonies and talks—there will also be gatherings on topics such as work, history, the challenges of geopolitics and science, and others. In addition, there will be the richness offered by the exhibits (beginning with the one on Job, with special attention paid to the mystery of the suffering of the innocent) and performances. But as always, the key word will be encounter, between people and worlds that in other settings would be difficult to bring together. "For example, there will be a delegation from the Library of Alexandria, Egypt, where in October we're going to do a little one-day Meeting" in the heart of Islamic culture.

These things would have been unthinkable at the beginning "because the Meeting was born at a moment when everything was very polarized and characterized by strong affiliations," observes Guarnieri. Today, everything is more fluid and less monolithic. "We understand better that the truth is not a series of pronouncements carved in rock once and for all: it's a journey. In 1982 John Paul II came to speak to us about the 'civilization of truth and love.' Well, today I understand more why he put them together. Love involves the theme of dialogue, encounter, the idea of the 'you who are a good for me,' and stands together with truth. This is the task, even if back then we didn't understand anything of this. Giussani yes, but us no..."

Seen in this way, the title of the Meeting is a review of its history, too. "It's true. Looking back, what made the Meeting possible, more than our abilities, was a desire for personal conversion. In June of 1968, when Giussani said that, 'Our task is not to ask ourselves what we have done to change the structures of the world, but rather at what point has our own conversion occurred?' he provided a judgment on the efforts that have gone into the Meeting. The gain for me has been an awareness of myself."

What do you expect from the Meeting this year? "That an encounter happen that can enable those who come to delve more deeply into themselves; that something true can happen, for me and for everyone." ■

Job's cry



by Ignacio Carbajosa

Why is the Meeting proposing an exhibit on a book written over 2,000 years ago? What does the biblical figure have to do with the 1968 protests? A reflection on the mystery of pain reveals what happened to reason and to the certainty in God's goodness.

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In these recent months, we have returned to the events that took place 50 years ago, May of 1968, the point of departure for changes that have determined our lives and thought today. What does a figure like Job have to do with those Parisian youth who clashed with police? Why propose at the Meeting, now, an exhibit on a book written 2,000 years ago?

There have been many attempts to understand the roots of the movement promoted by the young people of that time, and to explain its consequences for present-day culture. Without a doubt, a break with tradition, the "killing of the father," was one of the themes raised by the demands brandished by the young people of that hour. The slogan "The present, only the present!" has remained as the paradigm of a will to eschew any form of dependence and of an affirmation of an autonomous "I" whose point of departure is reason alone.

The Book of Job is illuminating on this point. In its pages, we find a battle between two mentalities, the "autonomous" one (represented by Job's friends), which excludes from the start the possibility of a nexus with something beyond the limits of "reason alone," and the mentality that emphasizes "dependence," which both establishes a battle with God and allows one to yield to a good Presence that imposes itself (as did Job).

Job's friends censure the question of the *why* of

suffering, a question that can only be addressed to God. For them, God is reduced to a clear rule: those who do evil are punished with evil. If Job suffers from his punishments, it means that he deserved them. They assign little importance to his proclamations of innocence, which were backed up by real facts. Instead, the true interlocutor for Job is not his group of friends, but God Himself. It is from God that Job asks an explanation, and it is with Him that he wants to engage in battle.

The biblical book grapples with the problem of the suffering of the innocent. The scandal of evil is a torment for a reason that cannot have everything submitted to its measure, and precisely in this the biblical book makes its great contribution: Job's reason is always in dialogue, even if in the form of rebellious challenges to God. What happened instead to modern reason?

After 1968 (but even well before, after the shift brought about by the Enlightenment), reason has found itself lost. It has lost its bond with the real that makes it naturally religious, its bond with the particular history of Christianity, which introduced the figure of God, the Father of Christ, as a good Presence in history.

In this sense, the movement of 1968 was a renewal and recasting of a shift that began in the Enlightenment. Let us try to follow the stages that saw the

Garut, Indonesia.



© Dikaseva. From the catalogue of the exhibition of theMeeting.

weakening of the image of the Father as a good Presence in history who accompanies our lives, a weakening that abandoned reason to a solitude for which it was not made.

In 1755, the sensibility of European intellectuals was challenged by an earthquake in Lisbon, which caused over 60,000 deaths. A radical question about God's goodness emerged: How could He permit such a thing? The reaction to the earthquake that would have the greatest influence on the history of thought was that of Immanuel Kant, who asserted that this problem cannot be resolved by theory. A gesture of *moral* rational faith enables us to affirm that God is in a *moral* relationship with His creation. He wants the good for it. We do not have access to the supreme wisdom, but, beginning from the moral law we find within us, we make a gesture of trust and conclude that God must also Himself be moral in the relationship with His creation. We must remember that Kant rejected any access to God through means other than *practical reason*; that is, a recognition of God identified with the moral law we find within us. For him, an event in history cannot be a way of accessing universal truths. It is interesting to observe that there had been other tragedies in Europe, for example, the Black Plague during the Middle Ages. But these events did not represent an objection to God's omnipotence. In the mentality of the people and in Western thought of the time, divine goodness was identified with the figure of the suffering Christ who died on the cross for us

and was merciful to women and men, a Christ who bent over the wounds of plague victims in the figures of the many saints who served the sick, to the point of contracting the plague themselves and sometimes dying from it. In the second half of the 1800's, trust in a good God was still possible: the Christian tradition permeated the *mens* of Western women and men, at least as a set of *values* that included the "Christian God." Once Kant declared that access to God through the historic event of Christ was not rational, or in other words, once he detached himself from the "statutory churches" or "historical churches" to propose a universal church based on a moral religion that preached a rational faith accessible to everyone, then the "good God" transmitted by the Gospels, and the morality that derived from Him, began to become hazier. The problem is that it is not necessarily true that reason *alone* can reach a rational faith like that proposed by Kant. Today, the opposite has become clear. Paradoxically, Kant's faith was *too Christian*. Having removed the foundation of the building that is Christian morality—which is Jesus Himself, alive and transmitted in the tradition of the *historical* Church—that building collapses.

The Kantian faith in a good God outside Christian experience is impossible today. It is not possible to stay in front of evil with the gesture of rational faith advocated by Kant. Auschwitz marked the end of the Kantian road. It is not possible to stay in front of that tragedy by standing on a rational faith that no longer exists in a Christian context. Kant killed Kant. At this point, Job returns. As will be seen in the exhibit, the answer to his sufferings was not an explanation, but a good Presence. Toward the end of the book, when God appears, He does not provide any answers to Job's questions, but places him in front of the wonder of the creation. "I had heard of You by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen You," Job concludes. Now he has a You to ask his questions. Outside this particular story, human reason, in front of the enigma of pain, is abandoned to a terrible solitude. ■



by Fabrizio Sinisi

Claudel



© Harlingue-Roger Viollet/Getty Images

“See impossible things”

The Meeting of Rimini will be inaugurated by a theatre production of Paul Claudel’s *The Satin Slipper*. One hundred fifty years after Claudel’s birth, this production brings to the stage the Christian paradox, in which the smallest detail is forever pierced by the eternal.

There is a crucial issue touched on throughout the oeuvre of Paul Claudel with peremptory clarity: that point of consciousness in which one becomes adult, reaching with one’s entire “I” and without excluding any part of one’s being, a maturity that unleashes a new freedom. For Claudel, freedom is always the consequence of an event, often a dramatic one. It’s what happens to Doña Prouheze, the main character of *The Satin Slipper*: she is a woman divided between three men, three reasons, and three visions of the world, through which she gains a new way of looking at things, a new way, and yet more precisely “her” way, of touch-

ing and possessing the entire world. In this work more than in any other, Claudel communicates to us that the narrow route through which one becomes an adult and grasps the totality of things is sacrifice.

The Satin Slipper, rewritten by Giampiero Pizzol and entitled *Through the Sea of Desire* will inaugurate this year’s Meeting. “A mad quest,” explains director Otello Cenci, “that nobody has ever tried before. A universal story, the telling of how through many storms our heart can discover its safe harbor, its place in the world.”

The Meeting is offering a crucial opportunity to see one of the great masterpieces of the 20th century, on the

150th anniversary of Claudel's birth. The choice to produce *The Satin Slipper* is particularly appropriate not only because of its historiographic value and the anniversary of the birth of its author, but also because it is extraordinarily pertinent to the title of the Meeting itself. The plot has a very simple narrative framework: in a legendary 17th century, Doña Prouheze, married to Don Pelagio but courted by Don Camillo, is profoundly in love with Don Rodrigo, who returns her love. This love will, however, never be consummated: the entire work is a development and exploration of the reasons for this renunciation, this sacrifice.

The whole world is brought onstage to celebrate the drama of human nature in front of the will of God. There is no place on earth that is not touched by the vicissitudes of *The Satin Slipper*: Europe, America, Asia, and the Orient are encompassed in an immense dramatic movement, a display of powers and of worlds that rotate around the story of a man and a woman who love each other without ever touching one other. Rodrigo and Prouheze cannot do without the world, the earth, the flesh, and yet all of it is never enough: they must surpass it, go beyond it. At the beginning of modernity, in which we still find ourselves, individuals come up against the drama of the fact that that they themselves are not sufficient to satisfy their desire. The drama, pain, and sacrifice of the human being will give life to a new human person, touched by God, who is at once in nature, against it, and above it, in a mysterious paradox in which the characters of *The Satin Slipper* are the actors. "Joy alone is the mother of sacrifice," says Ro-

drigo. "What joy?" the Chinese man asks him. "The vision of what she gives me," responds Rodrigo. "Do you think the torture of desire is joy?" the Chinese man continues questioning him. And Rodrigo, "She has not read desire on my lips, but gratitude." Every sacrifice flows from gratitude. Every renunciation erupts from our having received. Here we see how the personal drama begins to become cosmic: the actions of Rodrigo and Prouheze break natural logic, become testimonies that literally smash the structure of the known world. They break through it and make it transparent, and characters of different or even opposing orientations, cultures, and worlds glimpse an irresistible differentness, to the point of being drawn in by fascination and being changed. "The good that can come to me," confesses Don Camillo, "seems more fearsome than the evil."

"What I love," Rodrigo says of Prouheze, "is not that which is turbid and ambiguous and uncertain in her, nor do I ask of her that which is inert and neutral and fleeting in her, but that which is the cause of her herself. It is the naked being, the pure life, that love strong like my desire, like a great raging fire, like the laugh appearing on my face!" Rodrigo discovers that he loves in Prouheze something deeper than the woman herself, even more profound than her "weak features": the "naked being," the "pure life," a love stronger than both of them, strong like desire, things that make them alive even in the midst of sacrifice, that do not quench love, but rather, in sacrifice—paradoxically—save and fulfill them. A love that is great like the cosmos saves and fulfills the love of two indi-

viduals, small human beings closed in a drama that seems insoluble. This is shown well in the dialogue between Prouheze and the Guardian Angel:

Guardian Angel: *It was right that you made him know desire.*

Doña Prouheze: *The desire of an illusion? Of a shadow that forever eludes him?*

Guardian Angel: *Desire is of what exists, illusion is of what does not exist. Desire through illusion is of what exists through what does not exist.*

Desire, Claudel writes, is always authentic: it is always the flash of a truth. Even in this irregular and unfulfillable love, something immortal shines forth:

Doña Prouheze: *Will he love me forever?*

Guardian Angel: *That which makes you so beautiful cannot die. That which makes him love you cannot die.*

Later, in the dialogue between Prouheze and Don Camillo:

Don Camillo: *Prouheze, you will truly be Rodrigo's the day you cease to be his and are only God's.*

Doña Prouheze: *So to be Rodrigo's, I must give up Rodrigo?*

Don Camillo: *I believe that the cross will not be satisfied until you have obliterated all that which in you is not the will of God.*

Here is how the space between the individual and the cosmos is bridged: the will of God, the loving embrace of the cross as the place of the greatest human splendor. Claudel shows us how even the smallest detail can be pierced by the eternal, and in this way shine with a light never seen before, in such a way as to raise to anyone the question that Prouheze finally poses to Don Camillo: "Why could not your eyes, too, see impossible things?" ■

Mothers in Dublin



by Anna Leonardi

On the eve of the World Meeting of Families with the Pope, we went to Ireland, where, in the midst of a wounded Church, we saw the life of the CL community, with friendships, a playgroup, and an exhibit on Amoris Laetitia, because the country (like marriage) “needs the ‘I.’”

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The Dublin Convention Centre is an enormous steel and glass cylinder whose lights at night are reflected in the dark waters of the Liffey River, illuminating the magnificent harp-shaped Beckett Bridge, the icon of the new Dublin. For some years now, colossi like Facebook, Google, and Airbnb have made their homes in this area, the former docklands, together with many of the biggest financial institutions on the planet and a myriad of technology startups. This is the beating heart of the city. Everything that is vital for the rebirth of the country seems to come from here, from the womb of what has been baptized the “Silicon Docks” of old Europe.

A few miles south, on Merrion Road, in the parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace, a small group of mothers gathers every Tuesday morning. They arrive a bit before 10:00, arrange the chairs in a little carpeted meeting room, put on the kettle for tea, and then enter the church for Mass. Their children, who lower the average age of the faithful, sit politely in the first pews with the mothers. An old woman in the second row looks at them with admiration. At the end, when they recite a prayer for the World Meeting of Families, which will be held in Dublin in late August with Pope Francis, the little ones jump to their feet and recite the whole thing by heart: “Help us to live Your forgiveness and peace. Protect all families with Your loving care.” Then the children hurry off to the meeting room to play for a good hour while their mothers chat. Technically this is a playgroup, a phenomenon that is very popular in Ireland. You’ll find them in shopping centers and libraries, attended by mothers with preschool age children, and also

older ones during school holidays. The themes are varied, from nutrition to misbehavior, and handcrafts to shopping for diapers.

But here, the starting point was something else entirely. “I was looking for a place where I could talk about everything, where I could be free, and feel that people looked kindly on me and my children,” says Tara, one of them. Many of them are foreigners who moved to Ireland to follow their husband’s careers. The solitude of their days prompted them to knock on the church door. Father James opened it right away, even though playgroups in a church are not the norm. The parishes do not have catechism groups at any level. After Baptism, the schools, public schools included, are responsible for preparation for the sacraments. The idea of a “Mommy and me” playgroup has brought a certain efferves-



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Friends from the CL community prepare the exhibit on *Amoris Laetitia*.

cence to the still waters of parish life. As the children run about, the mothers read *Amoris Laetitia* together.

“For me, it’s increasingly necessary to come here,” says Anne Clair, a French woman with two very young children. “In Ireland there is a lot of emphasis on the family, on having children, and in the struggles of this period I keep in mind something the priest in France told me when we got married: ‘There are three great loves in life: for Jesus, for your husband, and for your children. When you have children, the love for them will take over, and you might forget the other two. But your love for your children will not be true if you do not love your husband. And you will not be able to love your

husband to the point of self-sacrifice if you forget Christ.’ So I looked for a place where I could continue to rediscover who Christ is.”

Tara is from Kansas, and has three children who are already fairly big. “They really like coming here because they look after the littler ones.” She doesn’t seem very satisfied with the school they attend. It’s private, Catholic, but something is missing. During the fierce campaign for the abortion referendum (on May 25th of this year, 66.4% of voters chose “yes”), some girls went around school with “yes” stickers on their uniforms. None of the adults had the nerve to ask them any questions. “Here, instead, I see adults who are not afraid.”

Today the group leader is Agata, a young Italian mother. She left Milan, a tenured position as a middle school teacher, and a beautiful home in the center of town. “I did it for my husband, so he could accept a work opportunity.” She is the only mother in the playgroup who belongs to CL. “When I arrived in Ireland it was really hard, but my friends in the Movement here always supported me, helping me not to censure anything of what I was going through.” She met Father James in Confession, and he proposed that she and her children come to the playgroup. She joined immediately. “It’s something small, but infinitely valuable for me. We have become so close,



which is unthinkable here among strangers. Often, some mothers don't come for months because their children are sick or they have found some part-time work, but then they return, at times even without the children! It isn't just an escape from solitude. We need a place where we realize the beauty we have in our lives."

Father James usually stops by halfway through the meeting. He jokes with the children and asks about those who are absent. Then he sits down and listens to the mothers. "This isn't something you see very often in Ireland," recounts Agata. "Here, after the pedophilia scandals, the priests are afraid to be with children. Some also feel defeated after the referen-

The Pope will participate in the 9th World Meeting of Families (August 21st–26th) on the theme: "The Gospel of the Family: Joy for the World."

da that introduced gay marriage and abortion." But Father James does not seem particularly frightened by the challenges the Church must face. Maria Avila, from Spain, as she nurses her firstborn, asks him how to start again in a world that seems to have collapsed. He answers serenely, "Starting with you and me," and then reads a passage from Ratzinger in 1969: "The Church will start anew from a minority that will restore faith to the center of experience. Only then will people see that small flock of believers as something totally new: they will discover it as a hope for themselves, the answer they have always secretly sought."

It is the beginning of a road that starts where there was nothing, one that moves past the confines of the parish to enter into neighborhoods and homes. Agata's afternoons are a series of meetings, like the one with Teresa, a Polish architect married to an Irishman, and the mother of three children. They live a few blocks from each other and met in the park. "She was the first person I met here who opened her home to me," recalls Agata. "We began getting together, and slowly also began sharing everything: the misunderstandings with our husbands, my weariness with newborn babies and hers with teenagers, the desire to return to work. We had the same problems, but one day Teresa said, laughing, 'Agata, you have the same problems as I do, but you're happy. You have something I don't have.'" So Agata began inviting her to the gestures of the community, such as the Christmas concert, the Way of the Cross, and an assembly with Fr. Julián Carrón. "She always came, but never asked what the Movement was. And if I tried to explain it better, she would say, 'No, that doesn't matter. *I follow you.*'" Last week they bought tickets to go to the August 26th Mass with Pope Francis in Phoenix Park. Teresa got them for her whole family. Her daughter Giulia had never seen the Pope, not even in a photograph. Probably her oldest daughter will ask in exchange to be allowed to go to the Gay

Parade. Teresa has decided to tell her no, but first has to discuss it with her husband. She's concerned but not agitated, and repeats, "We follow Agata."

It is so true that Teresa is following Agata that when she heard that friends in the Movement were beginning to prepare an exhibit on the family, she did not hesitate to offer to design the structures. She went to the meetings, read the drafts of the texts, and then made a model. The exhibit will be set up at the Royal Dublin Society, where the conference in preparation for the World Meeting of Families will take place. "We started meeting every Sunday morning for breakfast to read *Amoris Laetitia* together," recounts Mauro, the leader of the Movement in Ireland. "Without a precise project in mind, we let the Pope's words suggest a possible itinerary. It was not primarily a cultural work. Each of us was there because we felt questioned by something we were living." This was the case for Chiara, a hyperactive woman from Abruzzo, married to John Paul, a seraphic Irishman. They have been together for 12 years and have three children. She is a researcher at the university and he is a financial analyst. "We're very different, and as we say in Abruzzo, 'We're still together by the skin of our teeth,' which translated into the language of a believer means 'by the grace of God.' I got involved

in the exhibit because I wanted to do something for me. When the Pope says that 'marriage is a gift' it seems clear this is for me. But really, it's the most liberating thing. At the origin of our relationship, there's not my decision or abilities (or his!) but Someone who gives the relationship to us, and to whom we constantly need to return."

The theme of the love relationship can be further explored in *Disarming Beauty*, the recently published English translation of Carrón's book. This text and the Pope's Apostolic Exhortation became the two rails of the track toward completing the exhibit. "Chapter 13, which describes the dynamic of the sign in the relationship between a man and a woman, served as our guide," recounts Margaret, the coordinator. "It is the most original contribution we can offer on the theme of the family: the question of the 'I.' The 'I' of each of us makes marriage possible. What society needs is an 'I' that is self-aware, able to realize its thirst for the infinite and find what fulfills it." The texts of the exhibit will be accompanied by videos with testimonies and artworks, and many members of the community will serve as guides to explain the panels to visitors. "We want to encounter people and accompany them on the path of the exhibit. After all, the exhibit tells about the experience we are all living," explains Margaret.

Then there is the expectancy about what the Pope will say when he arrives in Ireland, a destination he strongly desired even though the planned initial location had changed. "There are conflicting feelings. After the referendum, many Irish people are feeling a kind of euphoria from being liberated from the authority of the Church. Others are deeply dismayed, as if a crucial battle had been lost," recounts Mauro. However, in newspapers and TV talk shows, some commentators, wondering about Ireland's future, are not able to close the door on a Christianity that still has something to say to postmodern people. For example, Brendan O'Connor wrote in the *Sunday Independent*: "People gave up the Church for various reasons. We replaced it with lots of things... But sometimes you wonder if there isn't something missing out there in the world, if we lost something when we rejected the heart of religion." The Pope's visit to Dublin is a great opportunity for everyone. Anna, one of the collaborators on the exhibit, says that, "we will be like a lot of Zacheuses waiting for him to pass." Even if there aren't any sycamores to climb in Phoenix Park, they want to see what life can become when a person lives the faith. ■



text and photos
by **Luca Fiore**

The church is open

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Fr. Michiel Peeters is a Dutch missionary in the Netherlands. In one of the major outposts of secularism, he poses the question that changed his life to college students: “Does Christ really respond to the needs of the heart?” We went to meet him on the campus.

“**M**ission doesn’t mean building big structures. It’s living your relationship with Christ together with the people whom you are given, even if it’s a small number. I learned that in the time I lived and worked with Fr. Francesco Bertolina, a missionary in Siberia.” A Germanic “r” ornaments the perfect Italian spoken by Michiel Peeters, a 41-year-old priest of the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo and a Dutchman from ‘s-Hertogenbosch, Noord-Brabant. “When I really think about it, that’s what made it possible for me to meet CL while I was studying in Leiden in 1997,” he went on to say. “That’s where I met Damiano, an Italian studying abroad. He spent time with me, with us, simply being himself.” Traffic is light on the highway that goes from Eindhoven, home of the tech company Philips, to Tilburg, the city of 200,000 where Peeters has worked as the university chaplain since 2012. He is a Dutch missionary in the Netherlands, a major outpost of secularism in Europe. In this part of the country, the churches were full 60 years ago. Now Catholic churches are having to close because there aren’t enough priests or faithful. “There was a time when, by total number, the Netherlands produced more missionaries than Italy,” Fr. Michiel explained. “The crisis that hit during the unrest of the late 1960s was unexpected. Everything fell apart very quickly.”



The entrance to the chaplaincy at the University of Tilburg.

Two banners decorate the brick wall outside, which faces a tree-lined road. The first is Caravaggio's painting *The Call of St. Matthew*, and the second, hung above a bike rack, asks simply, "Are you happy?" The door that leads to the chapel, down a few steps from the sidewalk, opens to the outside and bears a large sign announcing in red letters: "The church is open." This is the welcome extended by Maranatha Student Church, Fr. Michiel's chaplaincy. The environment requires that you be explicit as possible, at the risk of seeming in-your-face. One reason for announcing that the church is open is to draw attention to its existence, considering the nondescript (to say the least) architecture of the otherwise very nice building. The explanation for the use of English is quite simple: many of the 13,000 students on the campus are international students. The request for a missionary priest from the Fraternity of St. Charles came from now Bishop Emeritus of 's-Hertogenbosch, Antoon Hurkmans. He was the one who selected the Tilburg chaplaincy as the priest's destination. "I had no idea how to run a chaplaincy and, thinking about it, no one does," Fr.

Michiel said. "I just started out with what helps me. I reinstated Sunday Mass, which I celebrate in the afternoon in English. At the end of the Mass, I invite everyone to the two gestures I propose during the week: School of Community and cultural evenings, which I decided to call 'Maranatha Evenings.'" Before he came, the chaplaincy was run and attended by a few dozen theology graduates from the school who were in their sixties or older. Now, every Sunday afternoon, the little church fills up with about 50-80 young people and

adults from pretty much all over the world. During Mass, there is always a second priest who hears confessions behind a wooden grate in a corner of the chapel. “In the Netherlands, the Sacrament of Confession has practically been abandoned since the 1960s. I don’t tell people to go, I just make a priest visibly available. Each week, about a dozen people take advantage of it. I see that it does the young people a lot of good.” At the end of the liturgy, in one of the Maranatha meeting rooms, with light streaming through a wall of glass, people linger for tea and pastries. It’s a time to meet newcomers and share how life is going. There are also those who just come to sit in a corner and read the latest issue of the local weekly Catholic newspaper.

One couple among the current students and graduates who started to come to the chaplaincy are Ari and Cindy, from Indonesia. They start-

ed coming because they were looking for a Sunday Mass in a language they could understand. “My life was a never-ending list of things to do, but it seemed empty,” Ari explained. “I started to participate in the gestures of the Movement and I met people who, even though they have the same problems I do, were happy.” Now, he leads the small School of Community of young professionals and admits, “It’s incredible: my wife and I had to end up in the Netherlands to rediscover the value of our faith.”

Bertha, from Mexico, is a university employee, and until five years ago had stopped practicing her faith. Someone invited her to Fr. Michiel’s Mass and, “In time, I realized that this friendship was opening up my humanity again.” She also attended the CL Spiritual Exercises. “I’m drowning in responsibilities: work, children, my boyfriend. But in the

midst of the storms of life, there is a place where I can find the silence to hear the needs of my heart.”

Renier, who is a Dutch philosophy student and the son of a Calvinist pastor, came to the chaplaincy having lost his faith in God. What motivated him was Fr. Michiel’s curiosity and his approach to the faith, giving the reasons behind Christian words and gestures. Now, without anyone having asked him to do so, he became Catholic and is a regular in the life of the local Movement.

Rémon is also from a Protestant family. A few months ago, he moved into a room that was available at the chaplaincy. In exchange, he helps Fr. Michiel take care of some practical things around the center. “I came here when I had gotten stuck working on my thesis. I had the impression that there was a lack of freedom in me that wasn’t just about my schoolwork. I was able to speak to Fr. Michiel about that. Now the friendship with him and his friends is helping me to cultivate my questions about life.” He says he has no intention of becoming Catholic, but he attends the School of Community, the Maranatha Evenings, and even the CL Spiritual Exercises. Last year, he was a volunteer at the Rimini Meeting, and this year he also went to the Rhein Meeting in Cologne.

Maddalena came to Tilburg with Carlo, then her boyfriend, now her husband, whose studies brought him there. She grew up in Vittorio Veneto in Treviso, Italy, and had heard of CL—but not good things—at her parish. She came across Maranatha because Carlo wanted to find a Catholic Mass. She had dis-



tanced herself a bit from the Church. “I started coming to the cultural evenings because they were in English. Film, art, music: Fr. Michiel always had interesting reflections. Also, he has a way of getting you involved: I found myself in the middle of a few initiatives without even knowing how I got there. But I always left happy.” Then she added, “It was the relationship with him and closeness with our friends in CL that made us overcome our fear of getting married in the Church. Looking at the families we were friends with, we started thinking of it as a new beginning rather than a final destination. Xüe, a student from Peking, helps Fr. Michiel in the small bookshop he set up at Maranatha. It sells books by Fr. Giussani, Paul Claudel, Oscar Miłosz, T.S. Eliot, etc. “I came here at a time when I felt a little lost, and Fr. Michiel proposed that I participate in School of Community.” If you ask her if she is Catholic, Xüe responds, “No, I’m Chinese...” Velyana, from Bulgaria, is Orthodox, and Anna is from the Czech Republic; Christina is a Catholic from Slovakia; Heba is Indian Orthodox from Kerala: the United Colors of Tilburg.

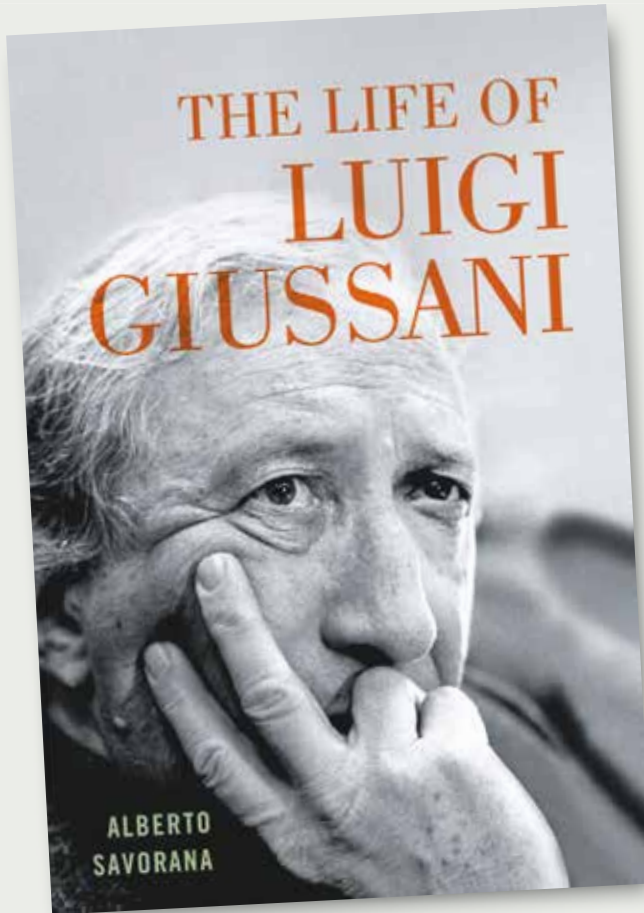
What is it that makes an impression on these young people? What attracts them, and why do they stay? “It’s God who creates the opening, even before they come here,” Fr. Peeters explained. “If they step through the door to the chaplaincy, it means that something has already happened. What I do is try to be visible around the campus, so that people know there is a priest they can go to. But at the beginning, for everyone, there’s a wound. Maranatha is a field hospital.” Today, many students have some ‘recognized’ problem, the missionary explained: “They’re dyslexic, or depressed, or have a learning disability... they try to ‘fix’ them by assigning a psychological diagnosis. There’s a Student Advisory Office, which provides different kinds of counseling, including psychological, that has a really long wait list. Sometimes they are the ones who send students to me.” In other words, nearly everyone comes to Maranatha with a problem: an illness, a major disappointment, or difficulties in school. “I listen to each one, but I almost always respond, ‘Look: I understand, what you’re telling me is important, but because of life experience, I know that your problem is even bigger than what you’re telling me, because it has to do with life itself. What I propose is a path to lead you to

understand whether life is really worth the trouble of living or not.’ Some never come back. Others stick around and start to come to what is proposed. No one objects to the hypothesis that I propose: that there’s a greater problem beyond the one they’re telling me about. The interesting part is seeing if Christ really responds to the great question of life. And that’s what I discovered: He does respond! I have seen people flourish while following the path that leads to that discovery, and I include myself in that number.”

Fr. Michiel doesn’t hide the fact that he too had to make that journey, and it makes no difference that he was already a priest. “There was a time when I was angry with life. What strikes me the most about these years as a missionary is how much I’ve grown,” he said. “My complaints weren’t related to my circumstances, they were tied to my weaknesses. A person gets angry because he feels empty.” For him, it happened while he was in Russia. A lot of things seemed to be going wrong. “I wrote to a friend, listing all the problems. He didn’t tell me, ‘You’re wrong,’ or ‘You’re not looking at things correctly.’ He reminded me of a line from St. Thomas Aquinas: ‘The life of man consists in the love that principally sustains him and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction.’” That was the beginning of a journey, he said, which made him discover the Movement for what it really is: “A road that makes it possible for you to live in exactly the situation you’re in. Even if you’re alone. Everything always begins again from that first love.” Fr. Michiel, why did you ask to be sent on mission to the Netherlands? “Because in realizing how many improbable circumstances God had lined up to grasp hold of me right here, where I was born, by having me meet CL, I started to think it must mean something...” He described how, in getting to know the Movement, he recognized what he had been missing throughout high school and college: a place where he could remain with all his humanity, not by virtue of what he knew how to do. “The Netherlands is one of the most anti-Christian countries in the world. Being a missionary here was an idea I mentioned to my superiors almost immediately after I entered the seminary.” Their response was: “Keep that desire alive.” Which he did, until the circumstances paved the way for him to come to Tilburg. “Now I see how much I need a place like the Netherlands to wake me up. It’s a difficult place, but God is using it to overcome my laziness...” ■

THE LIFE OF LUIGI GIUSSANI

by Alberto Savorana. Translated by Chris Bacich and Mariangela Sullivan



A detailed account of the life and legacy of the founder of the Communion and Liberation movement.

1,416 Pages, December 2017

Monsignor Luigi Giussani (1922-2005) was the founder of the Catholic lay movement Communion and Liberation in Italy, which has hundreds of thousands of adherents around the globe.

In *The Life of Luigi Giussani*, Alberto Savorana, who spent an important part of his life working and studying with Giussani, draws on many unpublished documents to recount who the priest was and how he lived. Giussani's life story is particularly significant because it shares many of the same challenges, risks, and paths toward enlightenment that are described in his numerous and influential publications.

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